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# Food Service in the Nation's Schools: A Preliminary Report

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FOOD SERVICE IN THE NATION'S SCHOOLS  
A Preliminary Report

by

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INTRODUCTION

During March 1968, the U.S. Department of Agriculture conducted a nationwide survey of school food programs. The survey dealt with availability of types of service, participation rates, costs to the schools, number of needy children served, and other aspects of school food programs. School milk, school breakfast, and school lunch programs were covered, together with food preparation facilities.

A more comprehensive report on lunch services in public and private schools is being prepared, updating two Marketing Research Reports on school food services--nos. 681 (public schools) and 678 (private schools), both issued as a result of a 1962 study. 1/ Although data collected in the 1968 survey are still being analyzed, some preliminary findings can now be reported.

PROCEDURE

To estimate school and pupil participation in food programs, a sample was taken of public and private elementary and secondary schools in the 50 States and the District of Columbia. The sample--8,000 public and 1,600 private schools--was drawn from lists maintained by the Bureau of Census. Half the schools received a questionnaire dealing primarily with school lunch services. The other half received one on milk and breakfast services and food preparation and facilities. Results in this report, based on the questionnaire concerning school lunch service, combine data for public and private schools. 2/ Figures on components are less precise than U.S. totals.

DEFINITIONS AND CLASSIFICATIONS

In this report, schools are classified by region, population of areas served, pupil enrollment, grades taught, and type of lunch service offered.

National School Lunch Program (NSLP)

The National School Lunch Program provides Federal assistance to school lunch programs through State grant-in-aid programs providing for both cash and food donations.

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1/ Kriesberg, Martin. Food Service in Public Schools. Marketing Research Report No. 681. Oct. 1964. Food Service in Private Elementary and Secondary Schools. Marketing Research Report No. 678. Oct. 1964.

2/ Figures compiled by the USDA's Food and Nutrition Service differ because they include lunch programs operating in Puerto Rico, American Samoa, Guam, and the Virgin Islands.

Public and nonprofit private elementary and secondary schools may participate in these programs and apply for Federal assistance. Participants must agree to make nutritious meals available on a nonprofit basis to all children. Schools also agree to provide free or reduced price lunches to children that local school authorities determine to be unable to pay the full price.

#### Other Lunch Programs

Some schools have lunch services but do not participate in the NSLP. For these programs, results combine plate lunch and a la carte food services.

#### Regions

Regional classifications conform to the administrative districts of USDA's Food and Nutrition Service, which administers the NSLP:

Northeast--Connecticut, Delaware, District of Columbia, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, Vermont, West Virginia.

Southeast--Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, Virginia.

Midwest--Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska, North Dakota, Ohio, South Dakota, Wisconsin.

Southwest--Arkansas, Colorado, Kansas, Louisiana, New Mexico, Oklahoma, Texas.

West--Alaska, Arizona, California, Hawaii, Idaho, Montana, Nevada, Oregon, Utah, Washington, Wyoming.

#### Grades Taught

Elementary--Schools with grades 1 through 8 or some portion thereof.

Junior and Senior High--Schools with grades 9 through 12 and schools with grades 7 through 9.

Other combinations--Schools not in the above categories.

### RESULTS

#### Availability of Lunch Service

Lunch service was available in over 76,000 of the 105,150 public and private elementary and secondary schools in the United States during March 1968, based on a projection of survey data (table 1).

Availability varied considerably by region, ranging from 61 percent of schools in the Northeast to 95 percent of schools in the Southeast. Lunch service was offered in three-fourths of schools in places below 10,000 population, compared with only two-thirds of schools in larger population centers. Also, lunch service was more prevalent in schools with larger enrollments. At least 80 percent of schools with 500 or more pupils, but only 55 percent of those with less than 250 pupils, had lunch programs. Finally, lunch service was much less prevalent in elementary schools than in other schools.

Ninety-two percent of all schools with lunch services participated in the NSLP. However, the figures were somewhat lower in junior and senior high schools, schools with large enrollments, and schools located in urban areas.

Since large schools are more likely to offer some type of lunch service than small schools are, lunches are available to more students than the percentage of schools with food service might suggest. Although only about seven out of 10 schools provide



lunch services, they account for 82 percent of the 50.7 million pupils in the United States (table 2). Most pupils in schools with food service had the NSLP available. Some type of lunch service was available to at least nine out of 10 pupils enrolled in the Southeast and Southwest, those enrolled in schools of 750 pupils or more, and those enrolled in junior and senior high schools, and in other grade-combination schools.

### Daily Participation

At the time of the survey, almost 19 million children were eating plate lunches under the NSLP on a normal day. An additional 943,000 were eating in schools with other plate lunch services (table 3).

The ratio of daily pupil participation to total enrollment in school lunch services exceeds the figures shown in table 3 by roughly 2 to 5 percent, since average daily attendance usually runs 5 to 10 percent below enrollment.

Participating students represented 39 percent of national enrollment. The proportion participating varied considerably by region and by school characteristics. For instance, daily participation ranged from 28 percent of all pupils in the Northeast to 68 percent of those in the Southeast. Fifty percent of pupils in places of less than 10,000 population participated daily, twice the percentage participating in major population centers. Variations by size of school were not so great.

### Needy Pupils Receiving Free or Reduced Price Lunches

At the time of the survey, 2.2 million pupils in public and private NSLP schools were receiving free or reduced price lunches daily (table 4). These pupils represented 6 percent of total enrollment in NSLP schools and consumed 12 percent of all plate lunches served. The highest proportion of needy children receiving free or reduced price lunches--13 percent of total enrollment--was in the Southeast.

Half or more of all the free or reduced price lunches served through the NSLP were in elementary schools. Also, when classified by population and by region, schools in areas with less than 10,000 population and schools in the Southeast each accounted for significant proportions of these lunches.

Schools outside the NSLP also provide lunches free or at reduced price to needy children. The survey found that nearly 100,000 such lunches were served daily, primarily in elementary schools, large schools, and urban areas.

### Schools Without Food Service

Lunch service was unavailable in 27 percent of all schools, comprising 18 percent of total enrollment at the time of the survey. In all, over 9.3 million pupils lacked lunch service.

Several features distinguished the 28,741 schools without lunch service (table 5). The most distinctive feature was that over 26,000 teach elementary grades. Since enrollment per elementary school is relatively small, a low enrollment is also a characteristic of most schools without food service. Most of the schools without food service were in the Northeast and Midwest, in smaller population centers. However, the actual number of pupils in schools without lunch service are rather evenly distributed according to size of school and population center.

Authorities at schools without a food service were asked if they planned to initiate one within 18 months. Based on affirmative replies, an estimated 1,600 schools, with 735,000 pupils enrolled, had made such plans. Most of these schools reflected the characteristics of schools without food service. That is, they were mainly in the

Midwest and the Northeast, in smaller population centers, and were mostly composed of the elementary grades. If past trends continue, most of these schools initiating a food service will join the NSLP.

If these plans for food service have been implemented since the time of the survey, the number of schools without food service has been reduced to approximately 27,000, with 8.6 million pupils. Moreover, additional funding by Congress since the start of fiscal 1969 probably has further reduced these indicated totals.

#### Lunch Service in Public Versus Private Schools

Because of their numbers and enrollment, public schools constitute a high proportion of all schools with food service and account for a large proportion of plate lunches served. Also, lunch service is far more likely to be offered in public schools than in private schools. For example, only 22 percent of the public schools--versus 60 percent of the private schools--did not have a lunch service at the time of the survey (table 6).

#### NSLP Trends Since 1962

In the 6 years between the 1962 and 1968 surveys, public and private school enrollment increased from 45.9 million to 50.7 million pupils. Approximately 73 percent of the 1968 enrollees were in schools participating in the NSLP, up from 70 percent of the 1962 enrollees (table 7). In all, 4.7 million more pupils had plate lunches available under the Federal program in 1968. Program statistics also indicate substantial growth in the number of free or reduced price lunches served daily since the time of the study.

The proportion of pupils having lunches available, as well as the number consuming lunches daily, also increased for most regions and types of schools. In both survey periods, the proportion of pupils in the NSLP was highest in the Southeast and lowest in the West. The major increases in coverage were in the Midwest and Southwest. Average daily participation continued at high levels in the Southeast and Southwest and increased for many types of schools. Participation as a percentage of total enrollment in all schools also increased somewhat.

Table 1.--Number of schools with lunch service offered, and as a percentage of all schools, by region and school characteristics,  
March 1968 <sup>1/</sup>

Item	National School Lunch Program		Other lunch programs		Total schools with lunch service		No lunch service		Total schools
	: Percentage : : of all : : schools :		: Percentage : : of all : : schools :		: Percentage : : of all : : schools :		: Percentage : : of all : : schools :		
	Schools	Percent	Schools	Percent	Schools	Percent	Schools	Percent	
United States .....	70,065	67	6,344	6	76,409	73	28,741	27	105,150
Regions:									
Northeast .....	13,750	56	1,188	5	14,938	61	9,650	39	24,584
Southeast .....	16,949	90	929	5	17,878	95	1,005	5	18,882
Midwest .....	19,807	60	1,558	5	21,365	65	11,859	36	33,224
Southwest .....	11,922	82	1,111	8	13,033	90	1,467	10	14,500
West .....	7,641	55	1,558	11	9,199	66	4,760	34	13,958
Schools located in places									
with population of:									
Less than 10,000 .....	41,423	75	1,367	2	42,790	77	12,281	22	55,070
10,000-49,999 .....	13,806	60	1,890	8	15,696	68	7,217	32	22,914
50,000-299,999 .....	8,222	56	1,394	10	9,616	66	5,058	34	14,675
300,000 and over .....	6,613	53	1,693	14	8,306	67	4,185	34	12,492
Size of school (pupil enrollment):									
Under 250 .....	15,053	52	975	3	16,028	55	12,619	44	28,647
250-499 .....	22,834	67	1,783	5	24,617	72	9,614	28	34,230
500-749 .....	15,913	75	979	5	16,892	80	4,341	20	21,232
750 and over .....	16,267	77	2,607	12	18,874	89	2,168	10	21,040
Grades taught:									
Elementary .....	46,515	61	2,963	4	49,478	65	26,232	35	75,709
Junior and senior high ..	10,429	74	2,637	19	13,066	93	1,093	8	14,159
Other combinations .....	13,121	86	744	5	13,865	91	1,417	9	15,281

<sup>1/</sup> Preliminary. Due to rounding, detail may not add to totals.

Table 2.--Pupils enrolled in schools offering lunch service and as a percentage of all pupils, by region and school characteristics,  
March 1968 <sup>1/</sup>

Item	National School Lunch Program			Other lunch programs			Total pupils with lunch service			No lunch service			Total pupils
	: Percent			: Percent			: Percent			: Percent			
	Pupils	of all	pupils	Pupils	of all	pupils	Pupils	of all	pupils	Pupils	of all	pupils	
	Thousands	Percent	Thousands	Thousands	Percent	Thousands	Thousands	Percent	Thousands	Thousands	Percent	Thousands	Thousands
United States .....	36,794	73	4,630	9	41,424	82	9,319	18	50,743				
Regions:													
Northeast .....	8,388	65	802	6	9,190	71	3,800	29	12,990				
Southeast .....	8,510	90	664	7	9,174	97	223	2	9,397				
Midwest .....	10,584	69	1,073	7	11,657	76	3,619	24	15,276				
Southwest .....	5,488	84	617	9	6,105	93	444	7	6,549				
West .....	3,826	59	1,473	22	5,299	81	1,233	19	6,532				
Schools located in places:													
with population of:													
Less than 10,000 .....	17,359	85	625	3	17,984	88	2,455	12	20,439				
10,000-49,999 .....	8,512	66	1,412	11	9,924	77	2,976	23	12,900				
50,000-299,999 .....	5,465	62	1,355	15	6,820	77	2,039	23	8,859				
300,000 and over .....	5,459	64	1,238	14	6,697	78	1,848	22	8,545				
Size of school (pupil enrollment):													
Under 250 .....	2,006	62	117	4	2,123	66	1,131	35	3,254				
250-499 .....	8,022	67	650	6	8,672	73	3,277	27	11,949				
500-749 .....	8,777	75	566	5	9,343	80	2,409	20	11,752				
750 and over .....	17,989	76	3,297	14	21,286	90	2,501	10	23,787				
Grades taught:													
Elementary .....	19,648	67	1,486	5	21,134	72	8,314	28	29,448				
Junior and senior high ..	8,626	73	2,639	22	11,265	95	489	4	11,754				
Other combinations .....	8,520	89	504	5	9,024	94	515	5	9,539				

<sup>1/</sup> Preliminary. Due to rounding, detail may not add to totals.

Table 3.--Average daily participation (number of lunches served daily) in lunch programs and ratio of daily participants to pupils enrolled in participating schools and to pupils in all schools, by region and school characteristics,  
March 1968 1/

Item	Schools with the National School Lunch Program			Schools with other plate lunch programs			Participants as percentage of all pupils				
	: Daily participants : as percentage : of pupils : enrolled			: Daily participants : as percentage : of pupils : enrolled			: National : School Lunch : Program				
	Thousands	Percent	Thousands	Thousands	Percent	Percent	Percent	Percent	Percent	Percent	Total
United States .....	18,956	52	943	36	37	2	39				
Regions:											
Northeast .....	3,506	42	185	31	27	1	28				
Southeast .....	5,915	69	89	51	63	1	64				
Midwest .....	4,930	47	190	32	32	1	33				
Southwest .....	3,011	55	211	53	46	3	49				
West .....	1,594	42	269	33	24	4	28				
Schools located in places with population of:											
Less than 10,000 .....	10,132	58	98	34	50	2/	50				
10,000-49,999 .....	4,179	49	252	27	32	2	34				
50,000-299,999 .....	2,755	50	294	44	31	3	34				
300,000 and over .....	1,890	35	299	44	22	3	25				
Size of school (pupil enrollment):											
Under 250 .....	1,525	76	47	57	47	1	48				
250-499 .....	4,433	55	147	33	37	1	38				
500-749 .....	5,030	57	208	50	43	2	45				
750 and over .....	7,968	44	369	22	33	2	35				
Grades taught:											
Elementary .....	10,813	55	390	37	37	1	38				
Junior and senior high ..	3,321	38	403	34	28	3	31				
Other combinations .....	4,821	57	150	42	51	2	53				

1/ Preliminary. Due to rounding, detail may not add to totals.  
2/ Less than 0.5 percent.



Table 4.--Needy pupils receiving free or reduced price lunches and as a ratio to all pupils enrolled in participating schools and to pupils consuming plate lunches, by region and school characteristics, March 1968 <sup>1/</sup>

Item	Needy pupils in NSLP programs 2/			Needy pupils in other plate lunch programs 2/		
	Number	Percentage of school enrollment	Percentage of pupils consuming plate lunches	Number	Percentage of school enrollment	Percentage of pupils consuming plate lunches
	Thousands	Percent	Percent	Thousands	Percent	Percent
United States .....	2,237	6	12	97	4	10
Regions:						
Northeast .....	342	4	10	12	2	6
Southeast .....	1,065	13	18	15	9	17
Midwest .....	295	3	6	13	2	7
Southwest .....	447	8	15	49	12	23
West .....	87	2	5	8	1	3
Schools located in places :						
with population of:						
Less than 10,000 .....	1,348	8	13	17	6	17
10,000-49,999 .....	286	3	7	16	2	6
50,000-299,999 .....	292	5	11	13	2	4
300,000 and over .....	311	6	16	50	7	17
Size of school (pupil enrollment):						
Under 250 .....	210	10	14	13	16	28
250-499 .....	619	8	14	13	3	9
500-749 .....	548	6	11	17	4	8
750 and over .....	859	5	11	54	3	15
Grades taught:						
Elementary .....	1,312	7	12	65	6	17
Junior and senior high ..	271	3	8	16	1	4
Other combinations .....	647	6	13	16	4	11

1/ Preliminary. Due to rounding, detail may not add to totals.

2/ Results are unadjusted for nonresponse of 5 percent. Hence, totals are minimums.



Table 6.--Selected comparative statistics of public and private schools from the survey of school food services, United States, March 1968 1/

Item	Schools with--				
	National	Other plate	A la carte	No	Total
	School Lunch	lunch	service	lunch	U.S.
	Program	service	only	service	
	----- Number -----				
Number of schools:					
Public .....	65,350	2,957	1,686	19,191	89,184
Private .....	4,715	1,045	656	9,550	15,966
Total .....	70,065	4,002	2,342	28,741	105,150
	----- Thousands -----				
Pupil enrollment:					
Public .....	34,891	2,092	1,682	6,267	44,932
Private .....	1,903	491	365	3,052	5,811
Total .....	36,794	2,583	2,047	9,319	50,743
Average daily participation					
in plate lunch programs:					
Public .....	17,884	736	---	---	18,620
Private .....	1,072	207	---	---	1,279
Total .....	18,956	943	---	---	19,899
Free or reduced price					
lunches served daily:					
Public .....	2,105	89	---	---	2,194
Private .....	132	8	---	---	140
Total .....	2,237	97	---	---	2,334

1/ Preliminary. Due to rounding, detail may not add to totals.



Table 7.--Public and private school participation in the National School Lunch Program, by region and other school characteristics,  
March 1962 and March 1968

Item	Schools serving complete plate lunch under the National School Lunch Program									
	Number of schools participating as :		Pupils enrolled as :		Average daily participation :		Average daily participation :		Average daily participation :	
	percentage of all schools :		percentage of all pupils :		as percentage of enrollment :		as percentage of enrollment :		as percentage of enrollment :	
	1962	1968	1962	1968	1962	1968	1962	1968	1962	1968
United States .....	60	67	70	73	48	52	34	37		
Regions:										
Northeast .....	56	56	67	65	41	42	27	27		
Southeast .....	78	90	85	90	59	69	50	63		
Midwest .....	50	60	63	69	49	47	31	32		
Southwest .....	72	82	77	84	57	55	44	46		
West .....	55	55	66	59	38	42	25	24		
Size of school (pupil enrollment):										
Under 250 .....	44	52	57	62	69	76	40	47		
250-499 .....	69	67	70	67	57	55	40	37		
500 or more .....	72	76	72	75	42	49	30	37		
Grades taught:										
Elementary .....	53	61	64	67	51	55	33	37		
Junior and senior high ..	73	74	75	73	38	38	28	28		
Other combinations .....	84	86	88	89	63	57	55	51		

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